

Shantaram: A book review

Zafar Kalanauri



Shantaram is the 2003 novel written by Gregory David Roberts, in which a convicted Australian bank robber and heroin addict who escaped from Pentridge Prison and fled to India where he lived for 10 years.

After reading a 900-something-paged book which is thrilling, philosophical, racy, romantic, giddy, heartbreakingly tragic, you would think one would be finally sated – having read something which is possibly about everything there is in the world. But when such a book still leaves the reader slightly delirious and wanting more, it makes you realise that this is no ordinary novel.

Shantaram is one of those rare books, which can make one rethink life from an entirely different perspective. It is almost a meditative experience. The debut novel of Australian writer, Gregory David Roberts, it is essentially an autobiographical piece of work, but parts of it are reportedly fiction as well.

In the year of 1980, while serving a prison sentence in Australia for committing several armed robberies, Roberts escapes to India where he spends 10 years before being caught and extradited back to his native land.

The 10 years in India for Gregory feature a series of transits and events, sometimes too fantastic and inconceivable for the average person. Roberts is welcomed in Mumbai, the busiest city of India, by an affable taxi driver named Prabaker. His first friend in India's metropolis fondly addresses him as Linbaba.

Prabaker takes Linbaba to the Colaba district of the city where he meets a German woman named Karla and instantly falls in love with her. Lin's immediate attraction and description of Karla can't help one draw parallels with the conventional Bollywood films where heroines are almost always idealistically gorgeous. "She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen." "The clue to everything a man should love and fear in her was there, right from the start, in the ironic smile that primed and swelled the archery of her full lips." However, considering Roberts spent a decade in India and even acted in films, yours truly won't grudge his Bollywood-like description of Karla. The latter is not a memorable character. Despite Lin's admiration towards her, she is uninspiring and their relationship is fickle and at best forgettable.

Lin manages to travel around Mumbai on the strength of his association with his taxi-driver friend and is increasingly exposed to the morbid offerings of the city. After a visit to Prabaker's village, he is dubbed Shantaram, meaning "the man of peace".

On his return to Bombay, the real drama unfolds with Lin getting mugged and landing up in a slum. Here he sets up a free health clinic for the poor and puts his modest medical training to use. The reader might say that this is where his predicament begins, but does it for Roberts? No. He battles swiftly through mafia, human trafficking, cholera, poverty, which would seem jarringly contrived, if it wasn't for the realistic portrayal.

With several vile accounts of life and people in Mumbai, Shantaram has the power to make you hate humankind. The part where Roberts is arrested by the Mumbai police and thrown into Arthur Road Prison where he is tortured beyond the cognitive capacities of a person makes for one of the most revolting, yet emotionally rousing moments of the book.

Fortunately, the head of the mafia council in Bombay, Khader, whom our protagonist met before his time in prison, arranges for his release. As Lin seeks out his perpetrator, Khader takes him under his wing. Lin dabbles in drugs, philosophical discussions with his mafia comrades, and even imparts English lessons. Not even India's film industry is too far-reaching for our central character as he lands in films before abandoning them to fight a war with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Admittedly, the book does make you raise eyebrows more than once as our protagonist seems like a superhero sometimes – living in the Mumbai slums; fighting with the Mujahideen are no mean feats, but Roberts pulls it off.

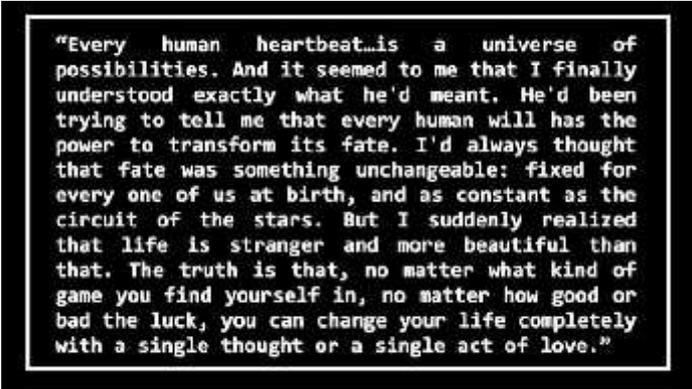
Shantaram is by no means ordinary. Although, certain events in the book may appear larger than life, it is a fair achievement. Roberts doesn't labour over India's myriad problems in the novel, but he isn't afraid to point them out either. Although, it may prove to be an eye-opening read for foreigners, it is quite commonplace for India's neighbouring nations, like Pakistan, which shares most of the problems. It is evident that the author genuinely loves India – his warmth towards the country and its people shines through the book.

The gorgeous language, undoubtedly, is the biggest strength of the book. Potent, lyrical, richly philosophical, the prose resonates with one on all the highs and lows of the multi-faceted plot.

For what it's worth, Shantaram is a thrilling read.

Shantaram Quotes

Here's a list of some of the best quotes I've come across in Gregory David Roberts' "Shantaram". I liked these lines very much and hence I'm trying to make a collection here so that I can refer to them whenever I want to. :)



"Every human heartbeat...is a universe of possibilities. And it seemed to me that I finally understood exactly what he'd meant. He'd been trying to tell me that every human will has the power to transform its fate. I'd always thought that fate was something unchangeable: fixed for every one of us at birth, and as constant as the circuit of the stars. But I suddenly realized that life is stranger and more beautiful than that. The truth is that, no matter what kind of game you find yourself in, no matter how good or bad the luck, you can change your life completely with a single thought or a single act of love."

- Sometimes even with the purest intentions, we make things worse when we do our best to make things better – Lin

- It is the mark of the age in which we live that the style becomes the attitude, instead of the attitude becoming the style – Didier
- That is how they manage to live together, a billion of them, in reasonable peace. They are not perfect, of course. They know how to fight and lie and cheat each other, and all the things that all of us do. But more than any other people in the world, the Indians know how to love one another – Didier
- It's a fact of life on the run that you often love more people than you trust. For people in the safe world, of course, exactly the opposite is true – Lin
- If fate doesn't make you laugh, then you just don't get the joke – Karla (one of my all time favorite quotes)
- The worst thing about corruption as a system of governance is that it works so well – Didier
- There is no act of faith more beautiful than the generosity of the very poor – Abdullah
- Sometimes the lion must roar, just to remind the horse of his fear – Abdullah
- There is no believing in God. We either know God, or we don't – Khader Bhai
- Shame gives exultation its purpose, and exultation gives shame its reward – Lin
- People do not understand the truly fantastic effort required in the corruption of a simple man. And the more simple the man, the more the effort it requires – Didier
- News tells you what people did. Gossip tells you how much they enjoyed it – Didier
- Only a wicked man can derive benefits from good works. A good man, on the other hand, would simply be worn out and bad tempered – Didier
- When we act, even with the best of our intentions, when we interfere with the world, we always risk a new disaster that mightn't be our making, but that wouldn't occur without our action – Lin
- Some of the worst wrongs were caused by people who tried to change things – Karla
- Fear and guilt are the dark angels that haunt rich men – Khader Bhai
- Despair and humiliation haunt the poor – Lin
- Trouble is the only property that poor people are allowed to own – Johnny Cigar
- Love seldom concerns itself with what we know or with what's true – Lin
- The world is run by one million evil men, ten million stupid men, and a hundred million cowards – Abdul Ghani (how true!)
- Nations neglect no men more shamefully than the heroes of their wars – Abdul Ghani
- You are not a man until you give your love, truly and freely, to a child. And you are not a good man until you earn love, truly and freely, of a child in return – Khader Bhai
- Optimism is the first cousin of love, and it's exactly like love in 3 ways: it's pushy, it has no real sense of humor, and it turns up where you least expect it – Lin
- The sane man is simply a better liar than the insane man – Khader Bhai
- Fate has every power over us, but two. Fate cannot control our free will and fate cannot control lie. Men lie, to themselves more than to others, and others more often than they tell the truth. But fate doesn't lie – Khader Bhai
- The truth is found more often in music, than it is in books of philosophy – Khader Bhai
- Good doctors have at least three things in common: they know how to observe, they know how to listen and they are very tired – Lin

- Suffering is the way we test our love, especially for God – Khader Bhai
- Sometimes we love with nothing more than hope. Sometimes we cry with everything except tears. In the end that's all there is: love and it's duty, sorrow and it's truth, In the end that's all we have – Lin
- Friendship is also a kind of medicine, and the markets for it too are sometimes black – Lin
- There is no reason good enough to make us fight with each other – Qasim Ali
- Justice is a judgment that is both fair and forgiving. Justice is not done until everyone is satisfied, even those who offend us and must be punished by us. Justice is not the only way we punish those who do wrong. It is the way we try to save them – Qasim Ali
- Poverty and pride are devoted blood brothers until one, always and inevitably, kills the other – Lin
- Nothing grieves more deeply or pathetically than one half of a great love that isn't meant to be – Didier
- One of the ironies of courage, and the reason why we prize it so highly, is that we find it easier to be brave for someone else than we do for ourselves alone- Lin
- There's no meanness too spiteful or too cruel when we hate someone for all the wrong reasons – Didier
- Any Indian man will tell you that although love might not have invented in India, it was certainly perfected there.
- We usually do, something worse than we can imagine is stalking us, and set to pounce. Fate's way of beating us in a fair fight is to give us warnings that we hear, but never heed
- Mistakes are like bad loves, the more you learn from them, the more you wished they'd never happened – Karla
- Silence is the tortured man's revenge – Lin
- Prisons are the temples where devils learn to pray – Lin
- In prisons, a man rations his smiles because predatory men see smiling as a weakness, weak men see it as an invitation, and prison guards see it as a provocation to some new torment – Lin
- Every virtuous act has some dark secret in its heart and every risk that we take contains a mystery that can't be solved – Khader Bhai
- The only victory that counts in prison, is survival – Lin
- Guilt is the hilt of the knife that we use on ourselves, and love is often the blade; but its worry that keeps the knife sharp, and worry that gets most of us, in the end – Lin
- You can never tell how much badness is in a man until you see him smile (a very nice thought, indeed)
- Despotism despises nothing so much as righteousness in its victims – Lin
- If you turn your heart as a weapon, you always end up using it on yourself – Lin
- Gold fires the eyes with a different kind and color of greed. Money's almost always just a means to an end; but, for many men, gold is an end in itself, and their love for it is the kind that can give love a bad name – Lin
- Happiness is a myth. It was invented to make us buy things – Karla
- Redemption's climb is steepest if the good we did is soiled with secret shame

- The effect, no matter how skilfully achieved, is always born in the artist's intuition. And intuition can't be taught.
- We can deny the past, but we can't escape the torment. The past is a speaking shadow that keeps pace with the truth of what we are, step for step, until we die – Lin
- It's okay if we all learned what we should all learn, the first time round, we wouldn't need love at all – Karla
- Pity is the one part of love that asks for nothing in return and because of that, every act of pity is an act of prayer – Lin
- Black money runs through the finger faster than the legal, hard-earned money. If we can't respect the way we earn it, money has no value. If we can't use it to make life better for our families and loved ones, money has no purpose – Lin
- I think wisdom is over-rated. Wisdom is just cleverness with all the guts kicked out of it. I'd rather be clever than wise, any day – Didier
- There's a kind of luck that's much more than being in the right place at the right time, a kind of inspiration that's not much more than doing the right thing in the right way, and both only happen when you empty your heart of ambition, purpose and plan; when you give yourself, completely, to the golden, fate-filled moment.
- The soul has no culture. The soul has no nations. The soul has no color or accent or way of life. The soul is forever. The soul is one. And when the heart has its moment of truth and sorrow, the soul can't be stilled.
- One of the reasons why we crave love, and seek for it so desperately, is that love is the only cure for loneliness, and shame, and sorrow.
- The only force more ruthless and cynical than the business of big politics is the politics of big business – Didier.
- It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured. I realized, somehow, through the screaming in my mind, that even in that shackled, bloody helplessness, I was still free: free to hate the men who were torturing me, or to forgive them. It doesn't sound like much, I know. But in the flinch and bite of the chain, when it's all you have got, that freedom is a universe of possibility. And the choice you make, between hating and forgiving, can become the story of your life.
- I was a revolutionary who lost his ideals in heroin, a philosopher who lost his integrity in crime, and a poet who lost his soul in a maximum security prison. When I escaped from that prison, over the front wall, between two gun towers, I became my country's most wanted man. Luck ran with me and flew with me to India, where I joined the Bombay mafia. I worked as a gunrunner, a smuggler, and a counterfeiter. I was chained on three continents, beaten, stabbed and starved. I went to war. I ran into the enemy guns. And I survived, while other men around me died. They were better men than I am, most of them; better men whose lives were crunched up in mistakes, and thrown away by the wrong second of someone else's hate, or love, or indifference. And I buried them, too many of those men, and grieved their stories and their lives into my own.
- There is a difference between the dishonest bribe and the honest bribe. The dishonest bribe is the same in every country, but the honest bribe is India's alone. - Didier Levy

- I was going through deep and silent water. Nothing and no-one could make me happy. Nothing and no-one could make me sad. I was tough. Which is probably the saddest thing you can say about a man.
- There's a truth deeper than experience. It's beyond what we see, or even what we feel. It's an order of truth that separates the profound from the merely clever, and the reality from the perception. We're helpless, usually, in the face of it; and the cost of knowing it, like the cost of knowing love, is sometimes greater than any heart would willingly pay. It doesn't always help us to love the world, but it does prevent us from hating the world. And the only way to know that truth is to share it, from heart to heart, just as Prabhakar told it to me, just as I'm telling it to you now.
- "Most loves are like that ... Your heart starts to feel like an overcrowded lifeboat. You throw your pride out to keep it afloat, and your self-respect and independence. After a while, you start throwing people out - your friends, everyone you used to know. And it's still not enough. The lifeboat is still sinking, and you know it's going to take you down with it. I've seen that happen to a lot of girls here. That's why I'm sick of love."
- Indians are the Italians of Asia and vice versa. Every man in both countries is a singer when he is happy, and every woman is a dancer when she walks to the shop at the corner. For them, food is the music inside the body and music is the food inside the heart. Amore or Pyar makes every man a poet, a princess of peasant girl if only for second eyes of man and woman meets.
- I stood in the harsh electric light of that new tunnel, in Bombay's Arthur Road Prison, and I wanted to laugh. Hey guys, I wanted to say, can't you be a little more original? But I couldn't speak. Fear dries a man's mouth, and hate strangles him. That's why hate has no great literature: real fear and real hate have no words.
- Fate gives all of us three teachers, three friends, three enemies, and three great loves in our lives. But these twelve are always disguised, and we can never know which one is which until we've loved them, left them, or fought them.
- That's how we keep this crazy place together - with the heart.... India is the heart. It's the heart that keeps us together. There's no place with people, like my people, Lin. There's no heart like the Indian heart.
- I know now that it's the sweet, sweating smell of hope, which is the opposite of hate; and it's a sour, stifled smell of greed, which is the opposite of love.
- The past reflects eternally between two mirrors - the bright mirror of words and deeds, and the dark one, full of things we didn't do or say.
- One of the reasons why we crave love, & seek it so desperately, is that love is the only cure for loneliness, & shame, & sorrow. But some feelings sink so deep into the heart that only loneliness can help you find them again. Some truths about yourself are so painful that only shame can help you live with them. And some things are just so sad that only your soul can do the crying for you.
- Sometimes we love with nothing more than hope. Sometimes we cry with everything except tears. In the end that's all there is. Love & its duty, sorrow & its truth. In the end that's all we have - to hold on tight until the dawn.

- The difference between news and gossip-News tells you what people did, gossip tells you how much they enjoyed it.
- Every day, when you are on the run, is the whole of your life. Every free minute is a short story with a happy ending.
- If fate doesn't make you laugh, then you don't get the joke.
- Nothing grieves more deeply or pathetically than one half of a great love that isn't meant to be.
- It's a characteristic of human nature that the best qualities, called up quickly in a crisis, are very often the hardest to find in a prosperous calm.
- One of the ironies of courage, and the reason why we prize it so highly, is that we find it easier to be brave for someone else than we do for ourselves alone.
- Lovers find their way by insights and confidences; they are the stars they use to navigate the ocean of desire. And the brightest of those stars are the heartbreaks and sorrows. The most precious gift you can bring to your lover is your suffering.
- There's no meanness too spiteful or too cruel, when we hate someone for all the wrong reasons.
- The sane man is simply a better liar than an insane man.
- Fate's way of beating us in a fair fight is to give us warnings that we hear, but never heed.
- The truth is that there are no good men, or bad men,' he said, 'It is the deeds that have goodness or badness in them. There are good deeds and there are bad deeds. Men are just men —it is what they do, or refuse to do, that links them to good or evil. The truth is that an instant of real love, in the heart of anyone —the noblest of man alive or the wicked— has the whole purpose and process and meaning of life within the lotus-folds of its passion. The truth is that we are all, every one of us, every atom, every galaxy, and every particle of matter in the universe, moving toward God.
- Guilt is the hilt of the knife that we use on ourselves, and love is often the blade; but it's worry that keeps the knife sharp, and worry that gets most of us, in the end.
- If you make your heart into a weapon, you always end up using it on yourself.
- Despotism despises nothing so much as righteousness in its victims.
- At first, when we truly love someone, our greatest fear is that the loved one will stop loving us. What we should fear and dread instead is that we won't stop loving them, even after they are dead and gone.
- A dream is a place where a wish and a fear meet. When the wish and fear are exactly the same, we call the dream a nightmare.
- Men reveal what they think when they look away, and what they feel when they hesitate. With women, it's the other way around.
- Happiness is a myth, which was invented to make us buy things.
- The lies we tell ourselves are the ghosts that haunt the empty house of midnight.
- We know that crying is a good and natural thing. We know that crying isn't a weakness, but a kind of strength. Still, the weeping rips us root by tangled root from the earth, and we crash like fallen trees when we cry.
- A good man is as strong as the right woman needs him to be.
- Anything that can be put in a nutshell should remain there.

- Fate always gives you two choices, the one you should take, and the one you do.
- The cloak of the past is cut from patches of feeling, and sewn with rebus threads. Most of the time, the best we can do is wrap it around ourselves for comfort or drag it behind us as we struggle to go on.
- Sometimes we see the past so clearly, and read the legend of its parts with such acuity, that every stitch of time reveals its purpose, and the kind of message enfolded in it.
- There is no man, and no place, without a war. The only thing we can do is choose a side, and fight. That is the only choice we get - who we fight for, who we fight against. That is life.
- Luck is what happens to you when fate gets tired of waiting.
- Nothing in any life, no matter how well or poorly lived, is wiser than failure or clearer than sorrow.
- You are not a man until you give your love, truly and freely to a child. And you are not a good man until you earn the love, truly and freely, of a child in return”
- Being in love we often pay no attention whatsoever to the substance of what lover says, while being intoxicated to ecstasy by the way it’s said”
- "Be true to love where ever you find it, and be true to yourself and everything that you really are."
- The truth is a bully we all pretend to like.
- “We all strive to do one good thing to balance all the wrong that we have done in the past”
- There's no believing in God...We either know God, or we don't.
- Sometimes, you have to surrender before you win
- "Silence is the tortured man's revenge."
- "Nobody is ever naked in India. And especially, nobody is naked without clothes.
- So...how do you take a shower?
- By wearing the over-underpants over underpants."
- "Some of the worst wrongs, were caused by people who tried to change things."
- For this is what we do. Put one foot forward and then the other. Lift our eyes to the snarl and smile of the world once more. Think. Act. Feel. Add our little consequence to the tides of good and evil that flood and drain the world. Drag our shadowed crosses into the hope of another night. Push our brave hearts into the promise of a new day. With love: the passionate search for truth other than our own. With longing: the pure, ineffable yearning to be saved. For so long as fate keeps waiting, we live on. God help us. God forgive us. We live on.
- The fully mature man, has about two seconds left to live.
- "Civilization, after all, is defined by what we forbid, more than what we permit."
- Optimism is the first cousin of love, and it's exactly like love in three ways; it's pushy, it has no real sense of humor and it turns up where you least expect it.
- The real trick in life is to want nothing, and to succeed in getting it.
- People always hurt us with their trust. The surest way to hurt someone you like is to put all your trust in him.”
- "Khaled, my first teacher, was the kind of man who carried his past in the temple fires of his eyes, and fed the flames with pieces of his broken heart. I've known men like Khaled in

prisons, on battlefields, and in the dens where smugglers, mercenaries, and other exiles meet. They all have certain characteristics in common. They're tough, because there's a kind of toughness that's found in the worst sorrow. They're honest, because the truth of what happened to them won't let them lie. They're angry, because they can't forget the past or forgive it. And they're lonely. Most of us pretend, with greater or lesser success, that the minute we live in is something we can share. But the past for ever one of us is a desert island; and those like Khaled, who find themselves marooned there, are always alone."

- Dream is the place where a wish and a fear meet. When the wish and the fear are exactly the same, we call the dream a nightmare. - Didier
- I hate it when people take so long to drink a single glass. It is like putting a condom to masturbate. - Didier
- It's a fact of life on run that you often love more people than you trust. For people in the safe world, of course, exactly the opposite is true. - Lin
- Discipline and abstraction of putting my life into words, every day, helped me to cope with shame and its first cousin, despair. - Lin
- Mistakes are like bad loves, the more you learn from them, the more you wish they'd never happened. - Karla
- Prison systems are like black holes for human bodies: no light escapes from them, and no news.
- Prisons are the temples where devils learn to pray. Every time we turn the key we twist the knife of fate, because every time we cage a man we close him in with hate.
- In prison, a man rations his smiles because predatory men see smiling as a weakness, weak men see it as an invitation, and prison guards see it as a provocation to some new torment.
- The only victory that really counts in prison is survival.
- Cruelty is a kind of cowardice. Cruel laughter is the way cowards cry they are not alone, and causing pain is how they grieve.
- Rule number one of street fighting - stand your ground and never walk backwards, unless you're preparing a counter-strike. Rule number two - never put your head down. Rule number three - always get crazier than the other guy. Rule number four - always keep something in reserve. - Lin
- "In matters of food I am French, in matters of love I am Italian, and in matters of business I am Swiss. Very Swiss. Strictly Neutral." - Didier
- The only force more ruthless and cynical than the business of big politics is the politics of big business.
- Now, sadly, there is all attitude and no style. It is the mark of the age in which we live that the style becomes the attitude instead of the attitude becoming the style.
- Sometimes the lion must roar, just to remind the horse of his fear.
- A politician is someone who promises you a bridge, even when there is no river.
- What characterizes the human race more,' Karla once asked me, 'cruelty or the capacity to feel shame for it?' I thought the question was acutely clever then, when I first heard it, but I'm lonelier and wiser now, and I know that it isn't cruelty or shame that characterizes the human races. It's forgiveness that makes us what we are. Without forgiveness, our species would've annihilated itself in endless retributions. Without forgiveness there would be no

history. Without that hope, there would be no art, for every work of art is in some way an act of forgiveness. Without that dream, there would be no love, for every act of love is in some way a promise to forgive. We live on because we can love, and we love because we can forgive.

- There is nothing so depressing as good advice, and I will be pleased if you do not inflict it upon me. Frankly, I am shocked at you. You must know this, surely? Some years ago I suffered such an offensively gratuitous piece of good advice that I was depressed for six months afterwards. It was a very close call - I almost never recovered.
- There's no animal in the world with a deeper sense of parody than a horse. A cat can make you look clumsy and a dog can make you look stupid, but only a horse can make you look both at the same time. And then, with nothing more than the flick of a tail or a casual stomp on your foot, it lets you know that it did in on purpose.
- We don't really know what a pleasure it is to run in our own language until we are forced to stumble in someone else's.
- Men wage war for profit or principle, but they fight them for land and women.
- For what is love if not the promise to forgive? - Lin
- I'd lost my closest friends in the same week, and with them I'd lost the mark on the psychic map that says You are here. Personality and personal identity are in some ways like coordinates on the street map drawn by our intersecting relationships. We know who we are and we define what we are by references to the people we love and reasons for loving them.
- "He would have made a good soldier."
- I raised my eyebrows in greater surprise. Modena wasn't just meek, it seemed to me then, he was a weak man. I couldn't imagine what Abdullah meant. I didn't know then that good soldiers are defined by what they can endure, not by what they can inflict.
- We are made out of stars, you and I.
- Optimism is the first cousin of love and it is exactly like love in three ways: it's pushy, it has no real sense of humor, and it shows up where "A man has to find a good woman, and when he finds her he has to win her love. then he has to earn her respect. then he has to cherish her trust. and then he has to, like, go on doing that for as long as they live. Until they both die. That's what it's all about. That's the most important thing in the world. That's what a man is, Yaar. A man is truly a man when he wins the love of a good woman, earns her respect, and keeps her trust. Until you do that, you're not a man."
- "Luck is what happens to you when fate gets tired of waiting"
There are no mistakes. Only new paths to explore."
- "Food is music to the body, music is food to the heart."
- "Sooner or later, fate puts us together with all the people, one by one, who show us what we could, and shouldn't, let ourselves become. Sooner or later we meet the drunkard, the waster, the betrayer, the ruthless mind, and the hate-filled heart. But fate loads the dice, of course, because we usually find ourselves loving or pitying almost all of those people. And it's impossible to despise someone you honestly pity, and to shun someone you truly love.
- "Indians are the Italians of Asia and vice versa. Every man in both countries is a singer when he is happy, and every woman is a dancer when she walks to the shop at the corner. For them, food is the music inside the body and music is the food inside the heart. Amore or

Pyar makes every man a poet, a princess of peasant girl if only for second eyes of man and woman meets.”

- “One of the ironies of courage, and the reason why we prize it so highly, is that we find it easier to be brave for someone else than we do for ourselves alone.”
- “hate has no literature: real fear and real hate have no words”
- “Nothing in the world is so soft and pleasing to the touch, as the skin of a woman’s thigh. No flower, feather or fabric, can match that velvet whisper of flesh. No matter how unequal they may be in any other ways, all women, old and young, fat and thin, beautiful and ugly, have that perfection. It's a great part of the reason why men hunger to possess women, and so often convince themselves that they do possess them: the thigh, that touch.”
- “Every virtuous act has some Dark secret in its heart; every risk we take contains a mystery that can’t be solved.”
- “A man opposite me shifted his feet, accidentally brushing his foot against mine. It was a gentle touch, barely noticeable, but the man immediately reached out to touch my knee and then his own chest with the fingertips of his right hand, in the Indian gesture of apology for an unintended offence. In the carriage and the corridor beyond, the other passengers were similarly respectful, sharing, and solicitous with one another. At first, on that first journey out of the city into India, I found such sudden politeness infuriating after the violent scramble to board the train. It seemed hypocritical for them to show such deferential concern over a nudge with a foot when, minutes before, they'd all but pushed one another out of the windows. Now, long years and many journeys after that first ride on a crowded rural train, I know that the scrambled fighting and courteous deference were both expressions of the one philosophy: the doctrine of necessity. The amount of force and violence necessary to board the train, for example, was no less and no more than the amount of politeness and consideration necessary to ensure that the cramped journey was as pleasant as possible afterwards. What is necessary! That was the unspoken but implied and unavoidable question everywhere in India. When I understood that, a great many of the characteristically perplexing aspects of public life became comprehensible: from the acceptance of sprawling slums by city authorities, to the freedom that cows had to roam at random in the midst of traffic; from the toleration of beggars on the streets, to the concatenate complexity of the bureaucracies; and from the gorgeous, unashamed escapism of Bollywood movies, to the accommodation of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Tibet, Iran, Afghanistan, Africa, and Bangladesh, in a country that was already too crowded with sorrows and needs of its own. The real hypocrisy, I came to realise, was in the eyes and minds and criticisms of those who came from lands of plenty, where none had to fight for a seat on a train. Even on that first train ride, I knew in my heart that Didier had been right when he'd compared India and its billion souls to France. I had an intuition, echoing his thought, that if there were a billion Frenchmen or Australians or Americans living in such a small space, the fighting to board the train would be much more, and the courtesy afterwards much less. And in truth, the politeness and consideration shown by the peasant farmers, raveling salesmen, itinerant workers, and returning sons and fathers and husbands did make for an agreeable journey, despite the cramped conditions and relentlessly increasing heat. Every available centimeter of seating space was occupied, even to the sturdy metal luggage

racks over our heads. The men in the corridor took turns to sit or squat on a section of floor that had been set aside and cleaned for the purpose. Every man felt the press of at least two other bodies against his own. Yet there wasn't a single display of grouchiness or bad temper”

- “Heaped up on the blankets, our bodies bound by weariness and her deep slumber, surrounded by sickness and hope, death and defiance, I touched the soft surrendered curl of Karla’s sleeping fingers to my lips, and I pledged my heart to her forever.”
- But the soul has no culture. The soul has no color, or accent, or way of life. The soul is forever. The soul is one. And when the heart has its moment of truth and sorrow, the soul cannot be stilled.

These are some of the quotes that I have jotted down in my quote book while reading the book. It was an awesome read. And I urge everyone reading this review to read the book as well.

